NPS Form 10-900
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Edgar Harvey Hennis House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 1056 North Main Street ___ not for publication

city, town Mt. Airy ___ vicinity of

state North Carolina code 037 county Surry code 171

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	___ public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
X building(s)	X private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	X private residence
___ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	___ yes: restricted	___ government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	X yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
	N/A	___ no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Thurmond Midkiff

street & number 1056 North Main Street (919) 789-2309

city, town Mt. Airy ___ vicinity of state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Surry County Courthouse

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town Dobson state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Laura A. W. Phillips "Preliminary Report: Surry County Inventory" has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes X no

date 1982 ___ federal ___ state X county ___ local

depository for survey records Survey & Planning Branch, Division of Archives & History

city, town Raleigh state North Carolina

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
X excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	X original site
___ good	___ ruins	X altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Edgar Harvey Hennis House, constructed in 1909, is a handsome, intact example of early twentieth century design reflecting influences of the late Victorian and Colonial Revival styles. Located at 1056 North Main Street, the west-facing house stands on a large, grassy lot marked by a random course granite retaining wall. At the rear, the lot slopes steeply downhill to North Street at the east; from the rear yard there is a fine view of Pilot Mountain in the distance. The Hennis House is located at the crest of Lebanon Hill, in a well-preserved residential neighborhood approximately three-quarters of a mile north of the Mount Airy central business district.

Resting on a random course granite foundation, the spacious one-and-one-half story asymmetrical brick veneer residence is three-bays wide and eight-bays deep. The slope of the lot accommodates a two-story rear ell at the north. The moderately high hip roof is marked by multiple projecting gables with returns. The gables are ornamented by fish scale shingles. Four tall decoratively corbelled interior chimneys rise above the asphalt shingle roof; the roof was originally sheathed with cedar shakes, still visible in the attic. The main block of the house features three-sided projecting front and side bays and a wide, U-shaped wrap-around porch carried by paired tapered box posts with molded caps set on coursed granite plinths. A shallow projecting pedimented porch marks the main entrance which is composed of a large beveled oval pane of glass set in an oak frame. Beveled glass sidelights and transoms which originally framed the main entrance were stolen in 1983 and were replaced with plain glass. Oak and oval glass doors in both of the projecting side bays provide additional access to the porch. These doors and the large full-height one-over-one sash windows on the main elevation retain the original beveled glass transoms. A two-tier shed-roofed porch runs the length of the south side of the rear ell; this porch is supported by robust turned posts connected by narrow balusters and a simple square hand rail. The back porch entrance retains the original screen door with decorative spindles. A variety of window types occur including tall, floor length one-over-one sash, smaller rectangular one-over-one sash, and six-over-six sash at the rear basement level. The Colonial Revival influence is evident in the windows which light the gables. The center front-facing gable features a Palladian window, while the north and south gables are lit by round arch one-over-one sash windows. Two other front-facing gables have smaller rectangular single pane windows. Granite lintels and sills, further accent the first story and basement level windows.

The interior follows a center hall plan. The elegant, wide center hall features hand-planed pine flat panel wainscot; a spindle frieze divides the front and rear portions of the hall. The rear hall is decorated with narrow tongue-and-groove pine wainscot. Tall, flat panel wainscot ornaments the study located in the ell. Originally there was no ready access to the vast attic space. In 1984 the current owner added a staircase with turned balusters in the rear portion of the hall. Stairs rise front-to-back to a landing, turn, and then rise back-to-front giving access to the half story. A wealth of original decorative features occur throughout the interior. These include pine floors (with carpet upstairs and in the first floor rear bedroom), dark stained pine woodwork, wide baseboards with molded caps, floral

embossed brass door hardware, and doors composed of five horizontal molded panels. The original plaster walls are now sheathed with sheetrock. The five mantelpieces are typical of the late Victorian style. Doric columns or colonettes support a robust mantel shelf and beveled glass over-mantels. Original green, burgundy or brown tiles surround the coal-burning fireboxes.

Upstairs, the attic has been remodelled to contain a hall, two large bedrooms and a bathroom; two other rooms at the south remain as attic storage. The stairs open onto a center hall/sitting room which is dramatically lit by the Palladian dormer window. The rooms to either side of the hall/sitting room feature sheetrocked cove ceilings which echo the shape of the round arch windows which light them. The baseboards and door surrounds replicate those located on the ground floor. Care was taken during the recent renovations to preserve as much of the original fabric as possible and to duplicate decorative features where necessary.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/ humanitarian	
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater	
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	X transportation	
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ other (specify)	
		___ invention			

Specific dates 1909 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Edgar Harvey Hennis House is significant both architecturally and for its historical associations. Located at 1056 North Main Street in Mount Airy, the house is a handsome, intact example of early twentieth century design reflecting influences of the late Victorian and Colonial Revival styles. The large, well-detailed, asymmetrical one-and-one-half story brick veneer house features multiple projecting shingled gables with Palladian and round-arch windows, projecting bays, windows with beveled glass transoms, a generous U-shaped wrap-around porch and a wealth of original interior decorative woodwork, mantelpieces and hardware. Granite, the hallmark Mount Airy building material, is used for window sills and lintels, porch plinths, foundation, and retaining wall. Constructed in 1909, the Hennis House is the earliest known residence built on Lebanon Hill. Lebanon Hill was a center of early Mount Airy suburban development from the 1910s through the mid-1930s. Located approximately three-quarters of a mile north of the central business district, Lebanon Hill was the site from 1831 to c. 1858 of the town's first Methodist Church. The house was constructed for Edgar Harvey Hennis (1884-1965), a prominent early Mount Airy businessman, horse trader and later, long-time owner of the town's Chrysler automobile dealership. Hennis' wife, Susan (1883-1983) owned the house until her death. The house remained virtually unaltered during their seventy-four year occupation. The present owner has preserved the house and sensitively renovated the kitchen, baths and attic space.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Associated with the early twentieth century development of the town of Mount Airy and the suburban residential growth of the Lebanon Hill area north of town.

B. Associated with the life of prominent Mount Airy businessman Edgar Harvey Hennis who spent most of his career in the transportation business--first as a horse trader and later as an automobile dealer.

C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of the late Victorian and Colonial Revival styles including an asymmetrical form, multiple projecting gables and bays, and Palladian and round-arch windows. Granite, the hallmark Mount Airy building material, is used for the foundation, window lintels and sills, porch plinths and retaining wall.

In 1909 when businessman Edgar Harvey Hennis paid $1,200 for a large lot on the crest of Lebanon Hill, about a ten minute walk north from Mount Airy's business district, his friends wondered "why would you want to build so far out of town?"[1] At that time, only a dirt wagon road extended into "the country" north of the small town. From 1831 to c. 1858 this hill had been the site of Mount Airy's earliest established church, Lebanon Methodist Church, located near the present intersection of North Main and Lebanon streets. The Episcopalian congregation also shared this church building in the early 1850s.[2] (It is not known how many or what type of residences were originally located near the church. No structures from that period survive). By the late 1850s, the center of Mount Airy, a village of about 250-300 residents, had shifted a mile or so southward. The Lebanon Methodist Church building was abandoned c. 1860 when the new Central Methodist Church was constructed on South Main Street between the present Bank and Wilson streets. The old Lebanon Church grounds continued in use for many years as a popular site for camp meetings and picnics.[3] The hill retained the name after the church disappeared.

When the striking, late Victorian/Colonial Revival style Hennis House was constructed in 1909 it was the only house located on Lebanon Hill.[4] Development of this suburban area soon followed. During the 1910s other neighboring houses were built. Local historian, Ruth Minick, recalled three other houses constructed during this decade: these were the Limmerman House and the Stewart House located across the street, and the Bailey House located next door to the Hennis House.[5] According to Louise Bailey, her family's house was built in 1911 for W. I. Monday; the Bailey family purchased the house and moved there in 1915.[6] Miss Bailey remembered that their house was considered "way out in the country. It was such a long walk to school, I thought I'd never get home. But several other houses were built after we moved there until about 1932, when things slowed down."[7] She also remembered their neighbor Mr. Hennis as being "a prominent man in town. He was a quiet man--not a great mixer--but he was well known and well established."[8] The house is shown on the 1922 Sanborn map. Earlier maps do not cover this area.

Edgar Harvey Hennis (1884-1965) was a prominent early Mount Airy businessman, drugstore owner, later a horse trader, and then owner of the Chrysler automobile dealership. In 1908 Hennis married Susan McGee (1883-1983) and construction on their stylish and substantial Lebanon Hill house began the next year. It took about six months to complete. Hennis' son, Frank, recalled his father saying that it cost $3,500 to build the carefully detailed house and that he hired a foreman to oversee the construction. It is not known who designed the house. The foreman and crew worked from "sun-up to sun-down"; the foreman was paid 40¢ an hour, while the brick masons and finish carpenters earned 20¢ an hour, and general laborers were paid 12¢ an hour. Edgar and Sue Hennis had three children and all of them were born in the house. They were Gray Hennis (1910-1971), Mary Lynn born in 1912 and Frank, born in 1915. Mary Lynn Hennis Haynes and Frank Hennis still live in Mount Airy and are neighbors on Country Club Drive.[9]

Until c. 1915 Edgar Hennis owned a drugstore located at 244 North Main Street. Hennis spent most of his career, however, in the "transportation business"--first as a horse trader and livery stable owner, and later as the owner of the town's Chrysler automobile dealership. From about 1915 to 1923 Hennis operated a livery stable and horse and mule trading business on Willow Street, a block west of the Main Street commercial district. The burgeoning popularity of the automobile meant the days of the livery stable were numbered. Historian James J. Flink wrote in America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910 that by the first decade of the twentieth century

> Owners of livery stables, too, began to feel the effects of the automobile on their business and a few of the more enterprising started automobile rental agencies or opened garages. . . . Each year the prospects of the city livery stable grew dimmer. By 1907 it was apparent that the auto industry's inability to produce reliable, low-cost vehicles in sufficient quantity was all that prevented the rapid disappearance of the horse from American cities.[10]

Edgar Hennis' brother, Sam, was one of the "more enterprising" who operated an early automobile service. He advertised in the June 1, 1916 edition of the Mt. Airy News: "Automobile Service--When you need transfer service or want to take a joy ride phone S. A. Hennis. . . .In parties of 5 or more the fare for the round trip to the Springs will be 25¢ each. Same price to White Plains and Brower Spring." Sam Hennis later founded the succesful trucking company, Hennis Freight Lines.[11]

In 1923 Edgar and another brother, Cecil, made a propitious purchase when they bought the local Maxwell automobile dealership, which operated in the granite building located at 130-134 Franklin Street. It was during that same year that Walter P. Chrysler took over the reorganization of the financially troubled Maxwell Motor Company. While the Maxwell automobile had been popular in its day, it was soon eclipsed by the enormous success of the new Chrysler Corporation. "Chrysler's associates had perfected a radically new car [in 1924] with a high speed, high compression motor and new body style."[12] The new Chrysler automobile appeared to suffer a setback when it was barred from the 1924 New York Automobile Show, since it had not yet been produced and sold according to the rules of the show. Undaunted, Chrysler "rented space in the lobby of the Hotel Commodore and stole the show. The car was a sensation. During the first year he sold nearly 32,000 cars at $50 million."[13] By 1928 the Chrysler Corporation was the third most profitable in the industry, after General Motors and Ford.[14]

According to Hennis' son, Frank, there were still a few Maxwells left in the Mount Airy showroom when his father bought the business, but they were soon replaced by the popular Chrysler. Frank Hennis reported that his father "did a good business during the 1920s--that is until 1929."[15] Automobile historians have written about the impact of automobility during the 1920s: "The majority of American families acquired a car in this decade. It was the golden age. . . . Cars were built to run and nobody thought much of driving 50 miles to a dance on the improved roads."[16] The construction of streets and highways accounted for the second largest governmental expenditure during the 1920s.[17] Even during the Depression years Hennis continued to sell a few cars and even though "he had a few repossessions, he stuck it out because he had saved some money during the good times. By early 1933, things started picking up."[18] From 1928 to 1941 the dealership was located at 457 North Main Street. In 1941 Edgar Hennis sold his half of the business to his brother Cecil, and the dealership was relocated to 124-132 Moore Avenue.

Very few alterations were made on Edgar and Sue Hennis' Lebanon Hill house during their seventy-four year tenure. One closet was added in the corner of the master bedroom (now the location of the kitchen). Frank Hennis recalled that when his sister was "of courting age", curtained French doors were added to the parlor for privacy. Sue Hennis "had a green thumb" and had extensive flower and boxwood gardens, still evident in the yard surrounding the house. Originally a large barn stood in the rear yard. Hennis kept six horses there, and later garaged his personal car there.[19] That barn no longer stands.

After Mrs. Hennis died in 1983, the house was sold to Thurmond Midkiff who has carefully preserved and renovated the house, installing modern bathrooms, a kitchen, and a staircase which gives access to the attic space. The attic has been renovated, creating two large bedrooms, a sitting room and a bath.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Telephone interview with Frank Hennis, June 11, 1985; see also Surry County Deed Book 53, Page 388.

[2]Ruth M. Minick, Central Methodist Church: Its Early Years (privately printed: 1975) pp. 34-34. Located in the North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[3]Minick, p. 35.

[4]Telephone interview with Ruth Minick, October 23, 1985.

[5]Minick interview.

[6]Telephone interview with Louise Bailey, October 23, 1985.

[7]Bailey interview.

[8]Bailey interview.

[9]Hennis interview, June 11, 1985.

[10]James J. Flink, America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), p. 53.

[11]Telephone interview with Frank Hennis, October 22, 1985.

[12]Rudolph E. Anderson, The Story of the American Automobile: Highlights and Sidelights (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1950), p. 283.

[13]Anderson, p. 283.

[14]James J. Flink, The Car Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975), p. 121.

[15]Hennis interview, October 22, 1985.

[16]Larry Freeman, The Merry Old Mobiles (Watkins Glenn, N.Y.: Century House, 1949), p. 120.

[17]Flink, Car Culture, p. 141.

[18]Hennis interview, October 22, 1985.

[19]Hennis interview, June 22, 1985.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Telephone interview with Frank Hennis, June 11, 1985 and October 22, 1985

James J. Flink, The Car Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Mt. Airy North, Va.-N.C. Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	17	535100	4040603
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Surry County Tax Map 5020.07, Block 79, Parcel 3038
The nominated property occupies city parcel number 3038 and is approx. 150' x 265' in size. See also Surry County Deed Book 53, p. 388

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state		code	county		code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patricia S. Dickinson, Consultant

organization | date November 22, 1985

street & number Rt. 2 Box 1034 | telephone (919) 732-5439

city or town Hillsborough | state North Carolina 27278

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature William S. Price, Jr.

title State Historic Preservation Officer | date January 9, 1986

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: | date

Chief of Registration

GPO 911-399

Surry County, North Carolina
Mt. Airy

Edgar Harvey Hennis House
1056 North Main Street

Surry County Tax Map 5020.07,
Block 79, Parcel 3038

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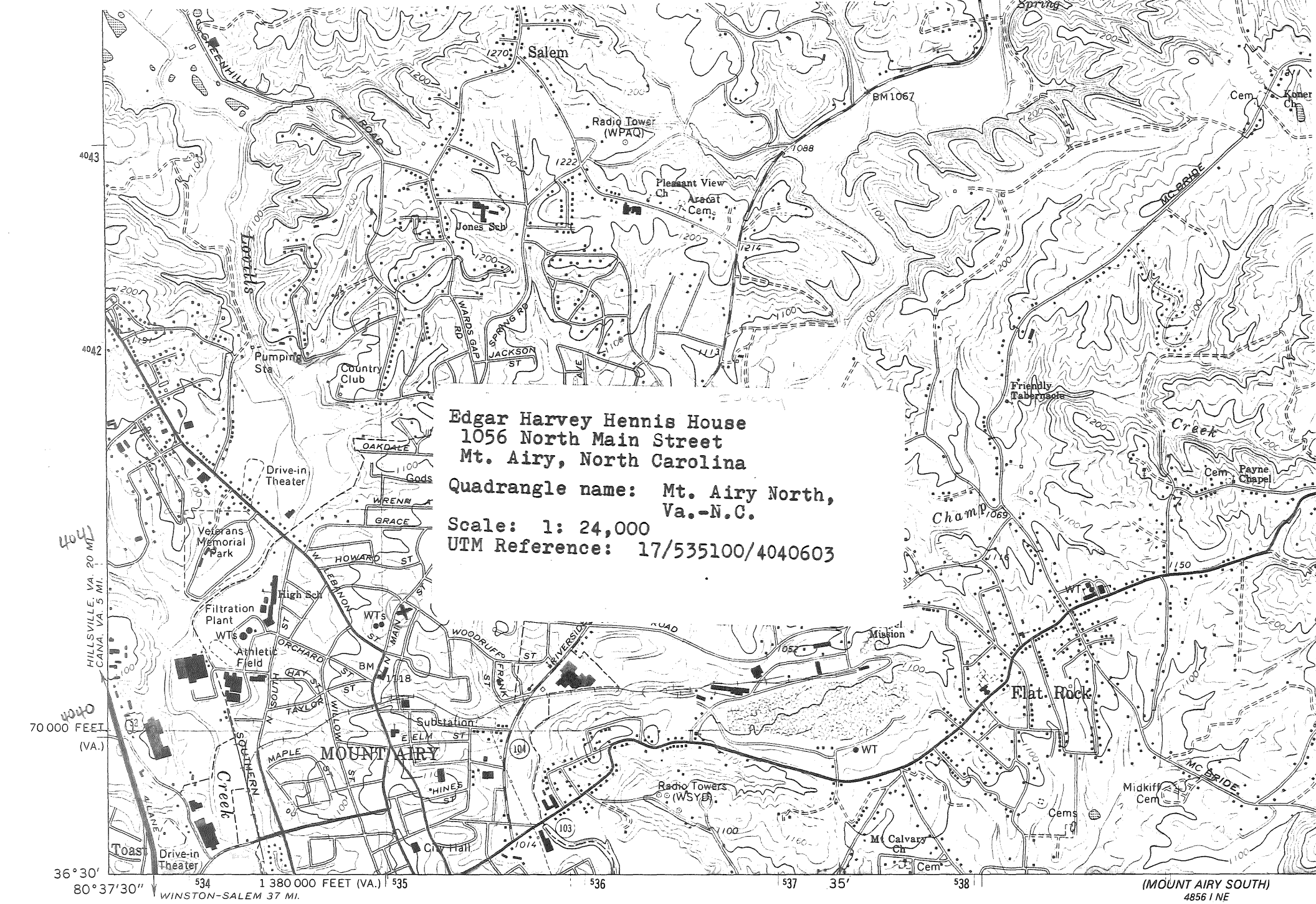
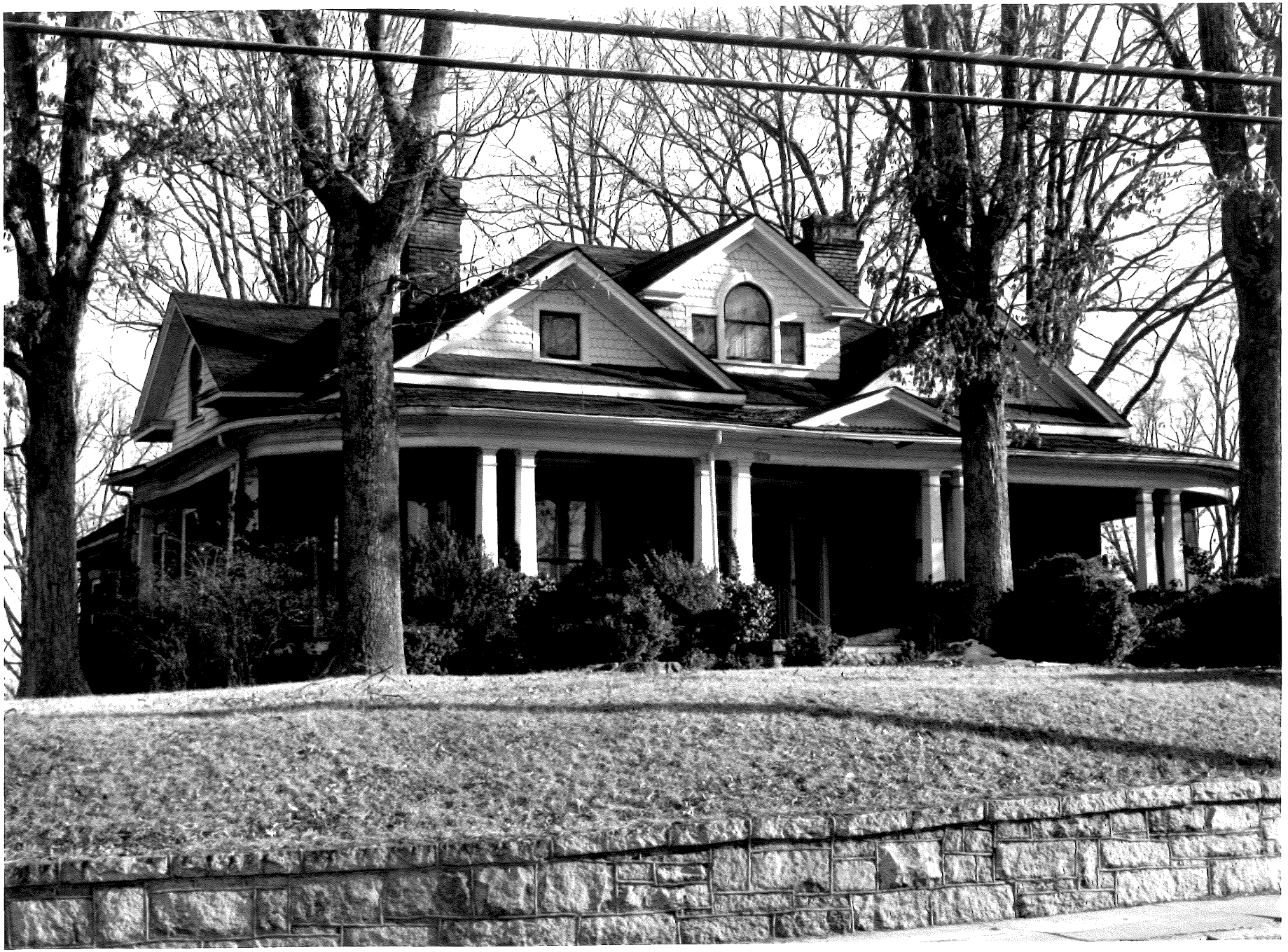


Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and USC&GS

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1967. Field checked 1968

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum